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TITLE: "Boys to Men": Holistic Approach to HIV/STD Risk Reduction in Correctional Facilities

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ISSUE: HIV/STD risk reduction messages are most effective when combined with a complete sexuality education program as part of a holistic approach to skills for living. Most young men growing up in less advantaged communities are not taught the skills they need to develop power over their environment or to live with the rules of the power structure.

SETTING: The participants are young men, age 13-17, incarcerated in the county juvenile detention center of a large urban area.

PROJECT: The "Boys to Men" project was developed to address this issue with a high-risk population at a time and place where they are easy to access and out of their normal environment. The curriculum is a 10-week program, in two-hour sessions, once a week. The topics include: the "monopoly analogy" which deals with life in comparison to the game of monopoly. It describes how life is about knowing the rules of the people in power to gain control over your own environment; power in America; win-win situations; the role of respect, responsibility, and resourcefulness in the lives of all people; definition of a "real man"; the concept of valuing the "life of the mind"; male health; father deprivation; HIV/STD behavior change; and communication skills. The sessions are highly interactive and use participatory techniques to increase learning and retention.

RESULTS: We have completed three cycles of the curriculum, a total of 60 hour, with 24-40 young men participating in all or part of each cycle. Detention center staff have provided anecdotal reports of significant behavior change in the young men.

LESSONS LEARNED: The process of conducting these sessions has strengthened our belief that persons encouraging HIV/STD risk reduction must find people where they are, recognize that all people have their own agendas and priorities, and find a meeting place from which to start to walk with them to a place where each of them (including the facilitator) benefits from the interaction.

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